provided a vital 'thread of contact between the suburb and the location' and the private world household and work and family. Both are described in the text with intensity and passion -- the powerful evocation of a crowd moving 'as a single living whole, singing as only South African can sing' is matched by the lyricism of a sharply defined personal perception of landscape and place -- of home in a Johannesburg suburb:

The jacarandas, with their strong high shoots, smooth grey branches and mille-feuilles, held the winter sunlight away from our front room, made the whole house colder and darker; on to the lawn minute leaves swept down silently all winter when a breeze blew. After them, the twigs dropped and then came the clatter of round hard seedpods on the corrugated iron roof of our home; until spring and the massive glory of the flowers dropping their bugles until the whole lawn was a mauve carpet, and flowers bursting with tiny explosions when the car wheels pressed them into the gravel of the drive.

Both are emotionally compelling -- the attractions of the public freedom in 'the square alive with singing' are counterbalanced by the consuming private 'desire to conform to middle-class normality', to retreat into domestic happiness and discover inspiration and comfort in landscape and nature.

In fact, private happiness was near to impossible without making the right public decisions, for such decisions were the outcome of a conception of honour which was profoundly personal. When Rusty Bernstein considers the possibility of going into exile before his arrest he decides against it: 'I don't know if it will do any good, inside or outside jail. But this is my country I don't want to join the exiles'. Here political actions revolve at least as much around questions of individual identity as they reflect the larger and more abstract strategic 'historic' deliberations of organizations.

But while for the Bernsteins and their comrades, political beliefs and political activity could help to constitute personal identity and enrich private life, it could also bring anguish and fear. The point is hardly novel but it is very rarely explored in political biography; the private costs of public courage are often acknowledged so mechanically and cursorily that they would be better left unstated. South African nationalist hagiography has a particularly unfortunate tendency to dehumanize its heroes. But Bernstein is a writer, not a producer of agit-prop. In her world the heroism hurts, and the bravery is all the more brave because it is a complicated courage which is informed by a personal morality which continues to function despite a feeling of being 'like helpless watchers in the playing out of a tragedy'.

There are many other good things in this book. The final section is about the Bernsteins' escape from Johannesburg. The Rivonia Trial was over, but in a sense it was a mere curtain-raiser for many similar ordeals. Rusty has been acquitted and now it is Hilda herself who is at risk with the onset of a cycle of arrests which is going to culminate in the capture and imprisonment of the surviving leadership of the Communist Party. It would be easy to write about those terrifying days in the language of melodrama but here there is a completely convincing quality in the way in which the plot of a political thriller is constantly interrupted by the necessary occurrences of ordinary life. When Hilda receives a sinister phone call both she and Rusty guess accurately that it is the Security Police establishing that she is at home. She must go, but first there are tasks to be finished:

Neither Rusty nor I mentioned 'Special Branch'. Rusty said, 'Let's get out of the house -- take the kids somewhere.' I said, 'I'll just finish the washing, and we'll go.'

He went into the front room and stood at the window looking out into the street; watchful, tense, smoking one cigarette after another without taking his gaze off the street.

In fifteen minutes time I heard him call, 'Aren't you ready yet?'

'Nearly -- just a few minutes,' I answered. 'I'm just putting in the last load of washing.'

Two minutes later he called again, this time compelling urgency in his voice: 'Hilda -- where are you?'

'Here -- in the kitchen.'

'Get out -- quickly; the back way.'

And I am at the end of the garden among the trees, as they arrive at both the front and back doors, in less than thirty seconds.

The subsequent narrative of the flight across the Botswana border must surely be a prototype for many subsequent descriptions of comparable episodes which though no less true are not somehow as believable as this one. The writing is economic and yet tells so much about the mixture of sickening fear, social dislocation, geographical disorientation, and occasional bathos which accompanied the Bernsteins on their lonely exodus. They lose their way, searching for the border fence, Hilda's feet hurt, they are given porridge and water at an impoverished Sechuana homestead, and finally travel to their first haven in a ramshackle cart drawn by two tired horses. The people are kind enough, but listless, they inhabit a different world with their own problems of a different order of magnitude. The Bernsteins arrive in Lobatsi, 'two streets that meet to form a T', small, dusty and parochial, but nevertheless the spying capital of South Africa, inhabited by incompetent colonial buffoons, spiky-legged gym-slipped school-children, intimidated shopkeepers, and South African policemen in very plain clothes.

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Greene's third world tragicomedies. Once again, the Bernsteins are members of a community, some of whose members are portrayed in richly detailed cameos. I had forgotten from my first reading of the book Bernstein's sketch of Fish Keitsing, the Robin Hood of Newclare, and making his acquaintance again would, by itself, have made it worth rereading The World That Was Ours. Maybe it needed a novelist's imagination to capture Mr Keitsing properly for historians have paid him only cursory attention. But Hilda Bernstein's book is not a novel, though it reads like a very good one; the people and the place exist -- the text is the product of acute observation, though as in fiction the images and symbols and people in the landscape are chosen with calculated precision.

The publication of a new and revised edition of *The World That Was Ours* is a welcome event. I am not sure that the additions have substantially improved the text and I remember more autobiographical detail in the original which I think should have been retained. But these are minor reservations. The events which it describes have now become an international legend. Legends are all too often peopled by gods and supermen. Hilda Bernstein's book reduces the legend of Rivonia to human proportions and restores to it a sense of tragedy. As a consequence the leading characters once again become capable of moving us with their frailties and strengths.

Autobiography From Another World

Tom Lodge reviews a book which is both an indispensable source on the Rivonia Trial and an outstanding work of autobiography

art of this book is about the Rivonia Trial and the political developments which led up to it. Hilda Bernstein has added new material to her original text (published in 1967) and as a consequence the section dealing with the events in the court-room has been extended, chiefly through drawing upon the unpublished manuscript of one of the instructing attorneys, Joel Joffe. The book's publication in this revised edition coincides with the 25th anniversary of the conviction of the six prisoners remaining in jail and is a celebration of the heroism and endurance of these men. It reflects a retrospective conviction, to

quote Bernstein's new foreword, that the Rivonia Trial was a 'great catalyst of change', a turning point when a 'time of seeming defeat' was transformed into 'the beginning of a new more militant movement'. This contention is debatable and it is certainly at odds with the book's ending in which a plane flight into exile is perceived to be 'their success' and 'our failure'. Fortunately, despite these additions, the process of reading history backwards from the present evident in the foreword has not been allowed to substantially affect the text: The World That Was Ours remains a book from that world, not today's.

For historians it is certainly an indispensable source for reaching an understanding of the Rivonia Trial. In greater detail than any other published account it chronicles the evolution of the defence strategy from the original decision taken by Mandela and the leading defendants to use the court proceedings as a forum 'to clarify the organisation's (Umkhonto) aims and policies, to reveal the true facts' to the more specific contestation of different charges in the indictment. Essentially, the defence team challenged four of the Prosecution's assertions These were that all of the accused were members of Umkhonto's National High Command, that Umkhonto we Sizwe was a section of the African National Congress (ANC), that the ANC was controlled by the Communist Party, and that Umkhonto had adopted a draft plan for guerrilla warfare entitled 'Operation Mayibuye'. Two hundred copies of the plan were discovered in a stove when the police raided Umkhonto's suburban headquarters in Rivonia.

The narrative of the trial is a compelling testimony of the courage and integrity of the accused and their defenders and it is salutary to be reminded of the specifics of these — of Mandela's determination to extract political gains

from the proceedings, notwithstanding the personal cost, Walter Sisulu's cool intelligence in rejecting the prosecution's efforts to induce him to incriminate people still at liberty, and Ahmed Kathrada's sharp and funny ripostes to Percy Yutar's bullying interrogation in the witness stand. Certain of the technicalities of the case have a continuing importance; as recently as last year a South African cabinet minister justified Mandela's continued detention on the grounds of his conviction for treason an offence for which he was never tried. It is one example of the way in which the crudities and misleading implications of the prosecution's case continue to inform official perceptions of Mandela and his comrades (as well as the views of quite respectable scholars).

Indeed, one of the oddities of the prosecution case was its dishonesty and incompetence — for there was enough valid evidence to convict most of the accused without resorting to false witnesses and irrelevant innuendoes. Part of the explanation for this can be located in the state's determination to maximize the political capital which could be accumulated from the trial: hence the visible demonstrations of state power outside the Palace of Justice as well as the tendentious efforts within its walls by police-coached witnesses to demonstrate ANC leader to be venal and cowardly.

Both sides, though, recognized the trial as an intense moral drama and therefore a vital opportunity for political theatre. In Hilda Bernstein's words:

The Rivonia Trial was a confrontation in which the Rivonia opposing forces in South Africa was a confrontation in which the opposing forces in South Africa appeared face to face; those who stood for apartheid, who defended and protected the apartheid State; and those who opposed it. The court was an ultimate court of morality; the issues were not the guilt or innocence of the accused, but the guilt or innocence of those who opposed apartheid.

In this context the ritual of the court is subverted and transformed into performance. This is especially obvious in Mandela's beautifully written and magnetically delivered opening statement. In the Rivonia Trial the attitudes of the accused to the legal proceedings were ambivalent. In his earlier trial of 1962, Mandela had challenged the legitimacy of a South African courts' jurisdiction. Contrary to the assertion in the text, he was not the first black political leader to do so - that credit should go to Pan-Africanist Congress leaders in their court appearances after the Sharpeville crisis.

At the Rivonia Trial, though, the chosen tactic of the defence was to demonstrate the legal impropriety of the arguments put forward by the prosecution. But as the narrative unfolds, the etiquette and conventions of the court are being simultaneously acknowledged and yet disregarded. The juridical formalism of defence statements is in sharp contrast with the extemporized shouts of 'Amandla' from the spectators and Nelson Mandela's clenched fist salute (in his first trial) — it was only in the 1970s that ANC slogans began to be routinely uttered from the dock. Similarly, though the accused wore suits, at least two of their wives were attired in national costume. Hilda Bernstein's story testifies to a widely shared consciousness of participation in actions which would lay the

basis for powerful historically motivating myths. To be sure, these were men who were fighting for their lives — but it is no reflection on their courage that they were also superb performers in a consciously scripted political drama.

he historian can learn much about the ANC's sensitivity to historical processes and the role of charismatic leadership in developing resistance traditions to affect the outcome of such processes. That achievement may in the long run by perceived by scholars to amply compensate for the mistakes which led to the capture of the Rivonia leadership, on which topic, incidentally,

The World That Was Ours, with or without the material from the Joffe manuscript, contains no factual revelations about the trial or the people and organizations involved in it. The public events which inform the narrative have mostly been a matter of public record. But the subtitle, and indeed the book's contemporary packaging, are misleading. For essentially this is not 'the book for all who really wish to know the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa' as is claimed by Archbishop Trevor Huddleston on the dust jacket. Indeed, this is not a history book, and the historical judgements which it contains are very much the products of their time:

The World That Was Ours. The Story of the Rivonia Trial by Hilda Bernstein

SA Writers, 309 + x pp., £14.95/£5.95, 12 June, 1 872086 01 2/1 872086 00 4

Bernstein is unsparingly honest. The World That Was Ours is also compelling when it deals with the political psychology of a society subject to state terror; notwithstanding the upbeat tone of the foreword, the text is as much about fear and betrayal and the demobilizing effects of both, as it is about the heroism and sacrifice of the giants of Rivonia. One of the most poignant and tragic images in the book is that of an army of desperate women trudging the suburbs in January 1963 is search of documentary evidence of former employment from incomprehending madams so as to avert the newly imposed pass laws. For these women, some of them no doubt veterans of the great protests of the 1950s, it is difficult to see how the Rivonia Trial could have constituted a turning point.

The factual accusations which were contested in court were very important at the time; 25 years on their significance has waned. It is still of considerable academic interest that the Rivonia leadership was divided over the wisdom or validity of the programme of guerrilla warfare spelled out in 'Operation Mayibuye', but the court-room testimony does not tell us very much about the content of objections to the programme. For several years after Rivonia the ANC was to attempt to promote a strategy very comparable to that outlined in 'Operation Mayibuye', and, indeed, Joe Slovo has recently stated that the High Command had more or less decided in favour of the document before he left South Africa in early 1963. The lawyers effectively discredited two witnesses who were obviously lying about the discussion of guerrilla warfare which they claimed to have listened to at the ANC's Lobatsi Conference. This was a crucial element in the prosecution's contention that Umkhonto was part of the ANC. In fact, though, the ANC National Executive was ready by 6 April 1963 - several months before the trial - to call Umkhonto its 'specialized military wing', so what may or may not have been said at Lobatsi need not have been an issue if the prosecution had done its homework properly. Trial evidence is at best a very limited version of the truth.

today, for example, a description of the Poqo movement as 'a return to something more primitive and tribal' would not be unquestioned as may have been the case in 1967.

he book's strength, though, is as a work of autobiography. In the richness of that genre as it is represented in South African literature, The World That Was Ours is outstanding. Its domain is first of all private, not public, though the story is about how the 'personal/domestic and public/political' became 'fused together'. That such a fusion can be extremely painful is a recurrent theme in the book.

The story begins at home, with Hilda Bernstein waiting for her husband to return from Rivonia, and it ends with the fragmentation of the community to which they both belonged and which gave meaning and purpose to their domestic life. Two worlds are being destroyed in this book — the public world of activism which for a few hundred whites provided a vital 'thread of contact between the suburb and the location' and the private world of household, work and family. Both are described in the text with intensity and passion — the powerful evocation of a crowd moving 'as a single living whole, singing as only South African can sing' is matched by the lyricism of a sharply defined personal perception of landscape and place of home in a Johannesburg suburb:

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Tom Lodge is a staff associate at the Social Science Research Council in New York.

An Interview with Miriam Tlali

Cecily Lockett spoke to Miriam Tlali, author of the novels Muriel at Metropolitan and Amandla, in Johannesburg on 4 September 1988. A new collection of short stories entitled Soweto Stories was published by Pandora Press in March this year — in South Africa it is called Footsteps in the Quag (David Philip)

You were the first black woman to publish a novel in South Africa, and as far as I know, you are still the only black woman novelist in South Africa. [Posing the question in this way, of course, excludes black writers like Bessie Head and Nonnie Jabavu. Ed] How do you account for this? Why are there no other black women writing? A novel is something you have to reflect on; you have to create it, you have to have characters, interplay of characters, it has to reflect what goes on in your society, and so on. For a black woman I don't think it is very easy unless you have complete peace inside, which is something that I strive very much to get. You have to analyse situations, and all that needs peace of mind and time. It needs a long time and you have to think about it. And you have to dream about it and black women do not have time to dream.

What about some of the social and economic obstacles that you have to overcome in order to be a writer?

Social obstacles are always linked to political and economic obstacles. You have to have material, you have to have typewriters, you have to read a lot. That also means that you have to have a lot of time - not that I've had a lot of time myself, or that I've read so much. When I wrote my first novel, Muriel at Metropolitan for instance, I had not read much. I had only read a bit when I was doing my B. A. at Wits and even that was interrupted by my lack of money and the political set-up, which made it impossible for me to do what my mother wanted me to do. So you see, all this is always linked to the political happenings in this country. Now, some of the obstacles I encountered: I finished writing the first novel, Muriel, in 1969, but it was only published in 1975, and even then too, very much expurgated. A lot of material was removed from it to make it acceptable to the white reader.

By whom?

By Ravan Press. Very little editing was done. It was presented the way I had written it, but the thing is, they just expurgated a lot of material from it, which they thought would not be acceptable. So the first version — the South African version — does not have all the right terms, the originality, that I had in

my manuscript. Only later on did Longman come forward to ask for the manuscript to publish it abroad — with a lot of errors in it, I'm afraid.

So are you happier with the Longman version?

Yes, certainly I am — except for the errors that I'm talking about, which are many, some of them very jarring. But I am happier with it because that is how I had written the book.

Although you are the only black woman novelist, I know of many black women who are involved in organizations with cultural sections where, as cultural workers, they produce performance poetry and drama. I'm thinking of the Cosatu poet, Nise Malange. Do you know her work?

No, I haven't had time to go to these places. The problem is always a financial one. A lot of the places I'd like to see I just read about in the papers, and that's as far as it goes. Most of the time I do not have the money, and most of these which appear in town are a bit awkward because then I have to drive back or get a lift back into Soweto, and it's very awkward for a black woman. And I still have my responsibilities at home, as a house-wife

How do you see your work, then, in comparison with this kind of performance work which is being done? How do you relate to these women, since you write novels and they perform?

You know, it's just that I'm inclined to deal with material that is much more time consuming — longer, like a novel. But I would very much like to write plays. I have written two plays already. One of them has been featured abroad, and translated into Dutch, but it has never been shown in this country. But I'm hoping it will be. So I have written plays, and I think plays are very important and very necessary for our readers because, as I said, most black people, especially women, do not have the time to sit and read novels and so on, and to think about them, whereas other sections of the population have. So it would be better to have something like a play, so that they can think about it there and then. They don't have to go read over a number of pages, they can reflect on what they see.

It's more immediate.

It's more immediate and has a greater impact on their lives, I think.

I know you were also involved in an oral literature project with Ingoapele Madingoane and Gcina Mhlope. That was more immediate wasn't it? How did you enjoy doing that?

I enjoyed it very much. Especially because there was a lot of interaction between ourselves and the audience.

What were you actually doing? Reading your work?

Ja. Our works and from other people's works also, and reacting to performances by the drum-players and so on, and adjusting it. While they do the drum-playing we sort of read the works with it. The readers are also very much involved, and when they start shouting "Amandla!" everyone starts shouting "Amandla!" and the whole thing becomes very alive.

So you have done the kind of thing that performance artists do — involving the audience.

Oh yes. Like when we went to Cape Town, for instance, we had people like James Matthews reciting his poetry on the stage, and having the audience involved, like I say, with the artist and appreciating the work.

So you feel there's space for the kind of writing you do which needs reflection and, on the other hand, that kind of work. You feel they're both important? Yes, I think they're equally important. Although I think there should be even more of the plays and of the dramatisation of works to make them more alive to the audience. Our people don't read much.

Do you think art is important for political ends?

Oh yes. The people are art-orientated. They are people of action, people who believe in singing and dance, in making music reflect their lives. And this appeals much more to them. You'd have to be a bit intellectual to be able to appreciate some books which are written, but you don't have to be with that kind of presentation or dramatisation.

I'd like to change the subject a bit and

talk about women's writing. Your first book, Muriel at Metropolitan, and your most recent, Mihloti, were specifically about the experiences of black women in the South African context. In fact on the cover of Mihloti you point to the subjection and oppression of women when you quote your grandmother: "to say woman is to say pot; to say woman is to say broom". Would you call yourself a feminist writer?

Well, ja, I would call myself that, but not in the narrow, Western kind of way of speaking about a feminist. Black women are very much conscious of the fact that they are in fact the very people to make the home and very little credit is given to their efforts - which are so much crucial to the running of the home and the society. And I think the South African black women are very strong. I, for one, have had a very strong grandmother, and then my own mother, and I don't think this was accidental. For instance, we spoke about our societies and about women's contribution to them, about our own backgrounds, with writers like Flora Nwapa of Nigeria, when we were in Toronto. We even decided that we should actually write about our experiences. There was so much similarity between our lives as women, as people who grew up with the guidance of older women, who are very very central in our lives.

I know Alice Walker talks about "womanist" writing rather than "feminist", because she thinks "woman-centred writing" is a better way of describing the work of black women. She considers "feminism" to have white, Western middle-class connotations.

I would agree with that, 100 per cent. I remember the very differences that you are talking about came out loud and clear in the recent Congress and Book Fair we had in Montreal and in Toronto. Because, while the white women were concerned about the problems that arise between male and female, we were aware that the real problem is not so much a question of sexism as it is the issue of power: where does the power. really lie between the two sexes? And I for one feel that it is because of this very power that we have the sexist attitude of the man towards women. Because they are aware of it: everybody has had a mother and every man does not think his

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